

Once you are in a gang, it's not easy getting out. You may risk your life if you leave a gang.

### Take Action

- If you are threatened by gang members, don't overreact. Stay cool and try not to act scared.
- Ignore their threats and tell them you have no argument with them.
- If threats from gangs continue, tell your parents, the police or school officials.
- Don't be a "wannabe" by dressing or acting like you want to be in a gang.
- Hang out with kids who are not involved with gangs and don't want to be in a gang.
- Get involved in activities that are not gang-related, such as organized sports, summer jobs, community organizations, volunteer groups, faith groups, or arts and drama groups.

Start showing gangs that you have a zero tolerance for their activities. You can help by:

- Starting a graffiti clean-up program in your community
- Starting a youth group or club whose purpose is to improve the neighborhood or school.

*"Gangs are not just a parent problem, a school problem or a law enforcement problem. They are everybody's problem. We can not address the challenges posed to us by gangs unless we are informed and are prepared to act as a community."* John Corwin, Texas Attorney General

## Signs of Gang Activity

- A Rise in Truancy
- Increasing number of social groups with unusual names
- Young people wearing tattoos, beads, and colors
- Graffiti
- A rising incidence of confrontations

## As a Parent—What to Do

*Talk with and listen to your child.*

*Spend some special time with each child.*

*Put a high value on education and help your child do his or her best in school.*

*Help your kids identify positive role models.*

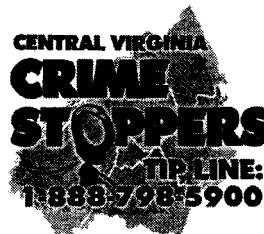
*Praise them for doing well.*

*Know what your children are doing, and with whom.*

*Address the issue. It is important to discuss gangs with your children and the problems they can create.*

*Talk with other parents.*

*If you suspect gang activity in your area, contact the police immediately. Gangs lead to crime problems and the police should be made aware of any potential problem areas.*



Information provided by the National Crime Prevention Council, 1700 K Street, NW Second Floor, Washington, D. C. 20006-3817

## The Reality of Gangs



**Lynchburg Police Department**  
805 Court Street  
Lynchburg, VA 24504  
455-6070  
Emergency — 911

## **What's the Deal with Gangs?**

Gangs are neither just a big city or inner city problem, nor are they a problem of a particular race or culture. Gangs cross all ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, gender, and geographic boundaries. They bring fear and violence to neighborhoods, traffic in drugs, destroy property, involve youth in crime, and drive out businesses. Gangs pull teens away from school and home into a life of violence.

One of the scariest aspects of gang violence is that it is often indiscriminate and unpredictable. Gang members have been known to kick, punch, hit, or even kill their victims. People get hurt if they are in the wrong place at the wrong time. If gangs or gang members are in your school or neighborhood, you know it.

### **Learn About Gangs**

- Gangs can be organized around race or ethnic groups, money making activities, or territory.
- Gangs usually claim a particular area of town which they call their "turf." They spend much of their time fighting rival gangs to keep them out of this territory.
- Females are moving away from the traditional role of being just girlfriends of the gang members and are becoming members themselves.
- Gangs wear particular items, styles, brands or colors of clothing. Some gangs wear bandanas of a certain color or baseball caps of a specific team.

- Some gangs mark their bodies with tattoos with their gang symbol or name.
- Gangs often use special hand signs or handshakes to tell others the gang to which they belong.
- "Gangsta" rap paints a realistic picture of daily gang activity. The lyrics glorify violence, abuse of women, and disrespect for authority, especially for the police.
- Contrary to what you may think, gangs are NOT around to help you. These groups of young people break the law, beat up people, and even murder.

### **Why Do Young People Join Gangs?**

What causes some teens to join gangs? Some common reasons are:

- Belong to a group
- Receive protection
- Earn money
- End boredom and seek more excitement
- Be with friends and be more popular.
- For some, it is even a family tradition.

None of these reasons are good reasons to belong to a gang. Most of the other kids who don't belong to a gang will be afraid of you and won't hang out with you. If you think you will be safer joining a gang, you're wrong. Most likely, you will increase your chances of being injured or killed. Think you'll be rich? Not likely. Over a lifetime, gang members make far less money than those who are not in gangs. By joining a gang you usually won't end up with a good education, making it harder to find a good job.

### **Join a Gang?**

Joining a gang is like entering enemy territory. Belonging to a gang has a warlike existence where beatings and shootings happen all the time. Typical scenarios of joining a gang involve violence.

- Boys usually have to fight several other gang members at the same time—this is called being "rolled-in" or "walking the line."
- Girls may be forced to have sex with several gang members or fight other female gang members.
- New members may be required to prove themselves by beating up an innocent person, robbing a store, or shooting someone—including drive-by shootings.
- If you break the rules after joining a gang, your punishment may be death.

### **What Does the Future Hold for a Gang Member?**

Gang membership can severely hurt one's health and future.

- Gang members may be killed or injured.
- Many put themselves in danger of disease, prison, and death.
- Many become dependent on alcohol and drugs.
- Gang members usually drop out of school, limiting their chances for higher education and good employment.
- They are likely to be involved in crime throughout the rest of their lives.
- They may commit serious and violent crimes that lead to lengthy jail time.